

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 A-01 NSC-05 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USSS-00
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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4857
INFO AMEMBASSY SEOUL
AMEMBASSY TAIPEI
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
USLO PEKING
CINCPAC HONOLULU
COMUSJAPAN YOKOTA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TOKYO 0857

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, OVIP, JA (MONDALE, WALTER F.)
SUBJECT: CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY -- SUNAO SONODA

SUMMARY. CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY, SUNAO SONODA, WILL SIT IN ON
FULUDA-MONDALE TALKS AND WILL BRIEF PRESS ON TOPICS COVERED.
TRADITIONALLY, CABINET SECRETARY'S POSITION IS ONE OF MOST
POWERFUL CABINET POSTS, SERVING AS MAIN SPOKESMAN FOR PRIME
MINISTER TO MEDIA, RULING AND OPPOSITION PARTIES AND BUREAU-
CRACY. ALTHOUGH NOT AS CLOSE TO FUKUDA AS SOME PAST CABINET
SECRETARIES HAVE BEEN TO THEIR PRIME MINISTERS, SONODA IS TOUGH
AND AMBITIOUS, A SAVVY POLITICAL VETERAN WITH KEEN SENSE OF
TACTICAL AND PERSONAL ADVANTAGE. THESE TRAITS -- AND HIS
VIGOROUS PRESS BRIEFINGS -- STAND OUT, PARTICULARLY COMPARED TO
CHARACTERISTICS OF BLANDER MINISTERS OF FINANCE, INTERNATIONAL
TRADE AND INDUSTRY, AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS. END SUMMARY.

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1. THE JOB. CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY OCCUPIES UNIQUE POSITION
IN JAPANESE GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE. NEXT TO PRIME
MINISTER, HE IS ONE OF TWO OR THREE MOST IMPORTANT MEN IN
CABINET, SERVING AS CHIEF OF STAFF TO PRIMIN, SENIOR GOVERNMENT
SPOKESMAN, CHIEF COORDINATOR FOR PRIMIN BETWEEN RULING LIBERAL
DEMOCRATIC PARTY (LDP) AND GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES, PRIME EMISSARY
TO OPPOSITION PARTIES, IMPORTANT DISPENSER OF FAVORS ON BEHALF

OF PRIMIN, AND MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO. HE IS USUALLY CHOSEN FROM AMONG PRIMIN'S CLOSEST AND MOST LOYAL LIEUTENANTS AND IS TRADITIONALLY INVOLVED IN PRIMIN'S MOST SENSITIVE AND CONFIDENTIAL DEALINGS. HE NORMALLY ATTENDS ALL SUBSTANTIVE MEETINGS OF PRIMIN, INCLUDING THOSE WITH FOREIGN GOVERNMENT LEADERS. CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY SONODA WILL ATTEND FUKUDA'S TALKS WITH VICE PRESIDENT.

2. THE MAN. SUNAO SONODA, 63, IS AN UP-FROM-THE-RANKS POLITICAL VETERAN -- FIRST AND LAST A "PARTY MAN." UNLIKE MAJORITY OF HIS CABINET COLLEAGUES, INCLUDING WELL-CONNECTED FONMIN HATOYAMA, HE IS NOT A GRADUATE OF JAPAN'S ELITE UNIVERSITIES OR A FORMER BUREAUCRAT, HAVING ENDED HIS FORMAL EDUCATION AT MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL. BORN IN RURAL KUMAMOTO PREFECTURE, SONODA SERVED IN JAPANESE ARMY IN MANCHURIA AND SAIPAN, RISING TO RANK OF MAJOR. AFTER WAR HE SERVED AS MAYOR OF HIS VILLAGE AND PRESIDENT OF LOCAL AGRICULTURAL FEDERATION BEFORE WINNING ELECTION TO LOWER HOUSE IN 1947. REELECTED SINCE, SONODA HAS HELD VARIETY OF PARTY POSTS, INCLUDING CHAIRMAN OF LDP DIET POLICY COMMITTEE WHICH FIRST BROUGHT HIM TO NOTICE, AND VICE CHAIRMAN OF POLICY AFFAIRS BOARD. HE HAS SERVED AS VICE SPEAKER OF LOWER HOUSE AND HEALTH AND WELFARE MINISTER IN SAT CABINET, WHERE HIS "FRESH" ACTIVIST IMAGE CAUGHT PRESS ATTENTION. HE HAS BEEN DESCRIBED BY THOSE WHO KNOW HIM WELL AS AN EXCEPTIONALLY SKILLFUL POLITICAL TACTICIAN, HARD WORKING, TOUGH AND AMBITIOUS.

3. WHILE HE HAS CONCENTRATED MAINLY ON DOMESTIC MATTERS, HE IS NOT A COMPLETE STRANGER TO INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS. HE HAS BEEN PARLIAMENTARY VICE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, OFFICIAL OF CONFIDENTIAL

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JAPAN-SOVIET SOCIETY, AND EARLY PROPONENT OF IMPROVED TIES WITH PRC AND INCREASED JAPAN-CHINA TRADE. HE IS ALSO SAID TO HAVE CLOSE TIES WITH ROK AND, ACCORDING TO AT LEAST ONE REPORT, IS PARTICULARLY CONCERNED THAT WASHINGTON KCIA REVELATIONS DO NOT SPILL OVER INTO JAPANESE POLITICAL SCENE. HE HAS TRAVELLED TO USSR, USA, ROK, SWEDEN AND POLAND.

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4. SONODA'S PREDECESSOR FREQUENTLY SHIED AWAY FROM FOREIGN POLICY MATTERS OR DEFERRED TO FONMIN OR FONOFF. SONODA HAS SHOWN NO INCLINATION WHATSOEVER TO FOLLOW THIS PATTERN. THROUGH HIS VIGOROUS PRESS BRIEFINGS ON INTERNATIONAL TOPICS, HE HAS SERVED AS GOVERNMENT'S MAIN SPOKESMAN, AND INTERLOCUTOR WITH OPPOSITION PARTIES ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES DURING DIET RECESS. THROUGH THESE BRIEFINGS AND PRIVATE REMARKS, HE HAS ALREADY IRRITATED FONOFF TO POINT OF BARELY CONCEALED ANNOYANCE.

5. RELATIONS WITH FUKUDA. SONODA IS NOT A CORE MEMBER OF FUKUDA FACTION, I.E., THOSE DIET MEMBERS INHERITED FROM FACTIONS OF FORMER PRIMINS KISHI AND SATO. ORIGINALLY A MEMBER OF FACTION LED BY DECEASED LDP STRONGMAN ICHIRO KONO, SONODA DID NOT FORMALLY JOIN FUKUDA UNTIL 1972. SINCE THAT TIME, HOWEVER, HE HAS PLAYED AN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT AND ACTIVIST ROLE IN FACTION AND PRESENTLY RANKS AMONG FUKUDA'S TOP THREE OR FOUR LIEUTENANTS. SONODA HAS LONG BEEN OUTSPOKEN SUPPORTER OF A
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FUKUDA PRIME MINISTERSHIP AND WAS STRONG ADVOCATE OF FUKUDA'S TAKING MORE DECISIVE STEPS TO BRING DOWN FORMER PRIMIN MIKI. HE WAS PRIME MOVER IN FORMATION OF ANTI-MIKI "UNITY" GROUP WITHIN LDP WHICH, AFTER LDP ELECTION SETBACK, ASSURED FUKUDA'S SUCCESSION.

6. BUT ALONG WITH ADMIRERS OF HIS ACTIVISM AND TACTICAL SKILL, SONODA HAS HIS CRITICS. MANY WITHIN FUKUDA FACTION, FOR EXAMPLE, CONTINUE TO VIEW HIM AS EXCESSIVELY AMBITIOUS OUTSIDER. HE IS ALSO THOROUGHLY DISTRUSTED BY MOST TANAKA FACTION MEMBERS, WHO HOLD HIM PERSONALLY ACCOUNTABLE FOR PROVIDING INFORMATION TO BUNGEI SHUNJU MAGAZINE WHICH LED TO PRIMIN TANAKA'S DOWNFALL IN

LATE 1974.

7. AS RESULT, WE UNDERSTAND THAT, DESPITE SONODA'S CONTRIBUTION TO FUKUDA'S SUCCESSION, HE WAS NOT FIRST CHOICE FOR CABINET SECRETARY JOB. FUKUDA, REPORTEDLY, WOULD HAVE PREFERRED FORMER AGRICULTURE MINISTER SHINTARO ABE, A KISHI SON-IN-LAW AND HEIR APPARENT TO FUKUDA FACTION. ABE HAD ALREADY BEEN APPOINTED TO AN IMPORTANT PARTY POST, HOWEVER, AND GIVEN DEBT OWED FOR PAST SUPPORT AND SONODA'S EXTENSIVE CAMPAIGNING FOR EITHER CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY OR FOREIGN MINISTER, FUKUDA DECIDED TO NAME HIM CABINET SECRETARY.

8. COMMENT. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FUKUDA AND SONODA IS CLEARLY LESS INTIMATE AT OUTSET THAN THAT BETWEEN PAST PRIME MINISTERS AND THEIR CHIEF CABINET SECRETARIES. THEIR PERSONALITIES ARE TOTALLY DIFFERENT: FUKUDA IS LOW-KEYED, CAUTIOUS, A GENTLEMAN; SONODA IS POLITICAL DOER, SEEKING TO ACQUIRE OR EXERT INFLUENCE. ACCORDING TO A FUKUDA INTIMATE, SOME MEMBERS OF FUKUDA INNER CIRCLE ARE ALREADY ASSERTING NEED TO CHECK SONODA'S ACTIVISM. WE DO NOT KNOW WHETHER FUKUDA HIMSELF SHARES THESE VIEWS. IN ANY EVENT, AS CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY, SONODA CAN AND WILL PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN EXPLAINING GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES -- FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC -- TO MEDIA AND, DEPENDING ON EVOLUTION OF HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH FUKUDA, HIS INFLUENCE ON LDP, OPPOSITION
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PARTIES, AND BUREAUCRACY COULD BECOME SUBSTANTIAL.
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Message Attributes

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